

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**THE “CURRENT” COMMANDER:  
UNDERSTANDING AND EFFECTING CHANGE IN CIVILIAN ORGANIZATIONS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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As the strategic environment is changing at an exponential rate, so must strategic military leaders of the 21st century. These leaders will be thrust into situations requiring interaction with members of the interagency and other civilian-led organizations and therefore must be prepared to deal with cultures and thought processes that differ from the military's. This "pentathlete," as Army Chief of Staff GEN Peter J. Schoomaker calls him, must develop new skills in order to thrive and affect change in organizations manned with predominately civilian employees. Military strategic leaders can no longer rely on rote or uniform approaches for building support and guiding and managing change. To remain effective, military leaders must gain a better understanding of the complexity and nuances of managing diverse civilian organizations including developing competencies on a wide range of concepts and skills that have traditionally been anathema to the military - "consensus building," "negotiation," and "broad-based empowerment." As the future strategic environment calls for increased collaboration and consensus building between and within military and civilian organizations, the Department of Defense must adapt its training, leader development and educational programs to prepare future leaders to more effectively lead increasingly diverse organizations and successfully manage change.



## THE “CURRENT” COMMANDER: UNDERSTANDING AND EFFECTING CHANGE IN CIVILIAN ORGANIZATIONS

The decision as to whether an order has authority or not lies with the person to whom it is addressed, and does not reside in ‘person of authority;’ or those who issue orders.

—Chester I. Barnard,  
The Functions of the Executive

Although in today’s volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world the differences between direct, organizational and strategic leadership have become blurred, there are still unique knowledge, skills, and abilities that are more prevalent at the strategic level than at the other two levels of leadership.<sup>1</sup> Tactical and operational fluency give way to an entirely new language – e.g., “consensus building,” “negotiation,” and “broad-based empowerment.” This can be difficult for military personnel who are trained for rapid decision-making in a hierarchical, mostly unicultural organization.<sup>2</sup> The transition is both complex and difficult and the tenets are challenging enough to constitute the foundation for senior leader development within the United States Army War College (USAWC) Strategic Leadership curriculum. USAWC defines strategic leadership as “the process used by a leader to effect the achievement of a desirable and clearly understood vision by influencing the organizational culture, allocating resources, directing through policy and directive, and building consensus within a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous global environment which is marked by opportunities and threats.”<sup>3</sup>

This paper will identify “new” competencies required by the transition to strategic military leadership of civilian organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century operational environment and provide a review of theories pertinent to understanding these new skills. It will then examine factors that affect change management within predominately civilian organizations. The paper will conclude with recommendations on how strategic military leaders can overcome interpersonal challenges and build guiding coalitions to effect change in civilian organizations.

### The Onerous Transition

The transition from direct and organizational leadership roles to strategic military leadership positions is difficult. The difficulty is due not only because of a wider range of influences, but, for many, it will be the first time they will interact with, lead and manage significant numbers of civilian subordinates, contemporaries, and supervisors. Invariably, strategic military leaders will assume leadership positions within organizations populated

primarily with civilian employees – e.g., Army Depots, Installation Management Command Regions and Garrisons, Army Corps of Engineers Districts, Army Material Command, Army Intelligence and Security Command, Defense Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, and many others.

The challenges are complex and diverse and require, among other skills, cross-cultural savvy - the ability to understand cultures beyond one's organizational, economic, religious, societal, geographical, and political boundaries. By and large, these strategic leaders are products of a systemic professional leader development model that provides a framework for successful leadership and management within hierarchical military organizations. Their practiced and practical experiences using these techniques have led to promotion and successively higher level positions...and now to the pinnacle of their profession: strategic leadership. But the same leadership skills that were responsible for their successes will likely not serve them well in their new strategic-level positions. Invariably, officers who have spent their careers mastering direct leadership skills experience "professional disorientation" when confronted with new tasks which draw little on their body of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> This is particularly true in the Army, where transformation is taking a competitive stance against traditional jurisdictions of the service.<sup>5</sup> The monumental scope of this difference requires focused study and preparation prior to assuming command of, or leadership positions in, a predominately civilian-manned organization. Even as the Department of Defense is already undergoing a dramatic transformation in both its organizational structure and management processes, the Secretary of Defense has increased the priority of another mission set – one requiring exponentially more coordination and involvement with, and understanding of, civilian organizations – Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations.

The increased emphasis on SSTR operations will require fully integrated civilian and military efforts. Whether conducting or supporting SSTR operations, the Department of Defense must be manned, trained and equipped to work closely with relevant U.S. Departments and Agencies, foreign governments and security forces, global and regional international organizations, U.S. and foreign nongovernmental organizations, and private sector individuals and for-profit companies.<sup>6</sup> In many respects, success in SSTR operations will be dependent upon the willing and voluntary participation of diverse and disparate strategic level organizations and agencies, whose solicitation, cooperation and synchronization of activities will, in turn, depend upon the skill of the strategic military leader.

The total number, range and extent of required strategic leader competencies are beyond the scope of this paper to elucidate; instead this paper will focus on a small but important skill set designed for interaction with civilian-based organizations.

### The Quest for Understanding

Understanding how and why organizations change has been a central research area for scholars in management and many other disciplines.<sup>7</sup> Countless studies, reports and theories have been published on the interplay between leaders and followers during periods of organizational change. Van de Ven and Poole (1995) reported a count of more than one million articles relating to organizational change alone.<sup>8</sup> This vast body of literature is replete with complexities, including multiple and competing theories and findings all shrouded with various levels of uncertainty.<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding, there are several key management approaches that have been included in the USAWC curriculum that can help provide a framework for comprehension and understanding.

### Leading People

Peter Northouse, in *Leadership Theory and Practice*, discusses the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, focusing on the dyadic relationship and interactions between leaders and followers. Previous leadership theorists treated leadership as collective treatment toward all followers, instead of focusing on discrete interpersonal interactions and discerning the treatment toward individuals and then grouping the strength or degree of interpersonal interactions. The author argues that leader-member relationships can be grouped in three major categories. In the *Stranger Phase*, relationships are characterized by reliance on contractual and hierarchical relationships and followers' self-interest motives, roles are scripted, influences are "top-down," and exchanges tend to be of low quality. In the *Acquaintance Phase*, leaders and subordinates develop greater mutual trust and respect and focus less on self and more on the goals of the group. Roles are tested, influences are mixed, and exchanges are of medium quality. Last, in the *Partnership Phase*, there exists a high degree of reciprocity that produces positive outcomes for both team members and the team. Roles are negotiated, influences are reciprocal, and the quality of exchanges is high.<sup>10</sup>

Northouse refers to 1975 and 1976 studies by Dansereau, Graen, Haga, and Cashman that address two types of relationships based on how well leaders and followers interact: the *in-group* and the *out-group*. The *in-group* relationship, characterized by informal negotiation, mutual trust and respect, and reciprocal influence, allows leaders to accomplish more and work more effectively. *In-group* members are willing to do more and are more innovative. In turn,

leaders give *in-group* members more responsibilities and support. The *out-group* relationship is based on formal communication, treatment according to contract, and no special attention. *Out-group* members do only what is required, operating within strictly interpreted “left and right limits.” Leaders deal with them fairly, but do not provide special attention or extra responsibility.<sup>11</sup>

Northouse’s treatment of the LMX highlights the importance for strategic leaders to assess their leadership from a relationship perspective. Acknowledging the interactive and morphing nature of leader-follower relationships and the importance of effective communication in overcoming perceptions of partiality and discrimination can result in a high functioning organization capable of change.

### Leading Change

John P. Kotter, in *Leading Change*, identifies errors common to organizational change efforts and their consequences, and as a result of his analysis, introduces an *eight-stage change process* that describes how to prepare an organization for major change and how to anchor the change in the organization.

His eight-stage change process includes:

- Establish a sense of urgency – urgency is crucial to gain needed cooperation, power, credibility and momentum for change
- Create the guiding coalition – a strong team with the right composition, trust and a common objective is necessary to overcome organizational complacency
- Develop a vision and strategy – leaders must frame a picture of the future with a compelling reason for creating that future
- Communicate the change vision – there must be a common understanding of the goals and direction of change
- Empower employees for broad-based action – help people become more powerful in order to take action to eliminate barriers to change
- Generate short-term wins - provide convincing evidence that the effort is worthwhile
- Consolidate gains and produce more change – reinvigorate processes to stave off reversion
- Anchor new approaches in the culture – developing processes to ensure continued success and making direct ties between success and positive change<sup>12</sup>

Kotter’s framework for leading and managing change postulates several key activities dependent upon in-depth understanding of the target population. Within organizations



predominately populated by civilians, cross-cultural savvy is paramount. Selecting the right civilian membership as part of the guiding coalition, understanding the culture and perspectives of civilian members so that the adopted vision will resonate both horizontally and vertically within the organization, and empowering the right civilian managers so that change efforts between organizational levels are effective, consistent and timely, all require adroit leadership and management skills *and* an in-depth understanding of the civilian workforce.

### Importance of Understanding Civilian Culture

Understanding the unique aspects of civilian culture and how it influences organizational performance is essential for overcoming cultural impediments, attaining strategic objectives and successfully managing change. Culture is the sum total of all the shared, taken-for-granted assumptions that a group has learned throughout its history.<sup>13</sup> It is a long lasting, complex set of shared expectations consisting of the collective attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize the larger institution.<sup>14</sup> The strategic leader must demonstrate cross-cultural savvy in order to effectively work within different cultures (and sub-cultures) and limit potential friction while pursuing strategic objectives.

### Differences in Military and Civilian Culture

Differences in cultures - the military's emphasis on mission accomplishment, order and discipline and society's emphasis on liberty - have existed hand-in-hand for over 200 years within our Nation. The nature of military service requires discipline, obedience, and a willingness to forego individual freedoms for the good of the organization. Although conducive for the conduct of military operations, these values are dramatically different than those of the civilian sector where individual rights and liberties and worker mobility allow for a range of individual responses and various degrees of commitment.<sup>15</sup> For managing civil service employees, this difference is further exacerbated by an archaic civil service system that essentially prevents the use of effective rewards or sanctions to influence civilian employee behavior.<sup>16</sup>

Commanders of military organizations can easily rely on both the organizational hierarchy and authoritative guidance that is backed by the threat of prosecution – the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Although small cultural differences abound within services (combat arms, combat support, branches, heavy versus light, etc.) and between services (army, navy, air force, marines), the members of the military demonstrate a remarkable common cultural bias developed through a powerful and deliberate indoctrination program. Within the all-volunteer armed services, incompatible members and aberrant behaviors are quickly weeded out through

voluntary separation or discharge. Moreover, there is no tolerance for insubordination, feet-dragging, or opposition. Consequently, there is little stratification of military members in groups based upon their willingness to support the leadership or fully back change efforts. Most military leaders would not tolerate any sub-group that openly or covertly did not fully support the organizational vision or missions, and would likely not even consider the development and use of a management approach that would best accommodate these kinds of behaviors. Within organizations that are manned by uniformed military personnel, the leaders' response to subversion or reluctance would likely be direct confrontation and coercion. It would become a matter of discipline.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, potentially subversive individuals and discordant sub-groups can and do exist openly within civilian-centric government organizations.

Leading change in a civilian organization requires effective communication, negotiation, and an understanding the importance of the voluntary support of individuals (and groupings of individuals) have on the success or failure of a proposed change. Changing attitudes, behaviors and sub-group norms is not possible through sheer force of will, but rather requires leaders who are adept at relating to employees in a way that is, at times, anathema to career military members. Thus, effective leadership of civilian employees requires a deliberate effort to build working relationships with individuals and sub-groupings of individuals to establish a foundation of trust and shared interests.<sup>18</sup> Effecting change in civilian organizations requires the identification of the various influences, personalities, and groups (including both *in-* and *out-groups*) that impact mission success, and the formulation of a management approach to amalgamate them into a high-performing strategic team.

Organizational changes often require five to ten years to come to fruition, and are even difficult to achieve in well-established military cultures. Given that the military routinely retains strategic leaders in command for only 2-3 years, it is imperative that strategic military leaders of civilian organizations identify a guiding coalition that can lend legitimacy to the effort and marshal the resources and institutional support required to induce organizational members to change,<sup>19</sup> especially after the "initiating" commander's departure. Kotter asserts that leaders often launch organizational renewal efforts, but "whenever some minimum mass is not achieved early in the effort, nothing much worthwhile happens."<sup>20</sup> Often this coalition is a confederation of disparate groups, personalities, and egos, requiring leader proficiency in consensus building, negotiation, and broad-based empowerment skills. It is within this management framework that this paper addresses specific challenges and influences that affect a strategic military leader's ability to lead change in a civilian organization.

### The Challenges of Civilian Organizational Leadership: Actually Doing It!

Although there are substantial differences between the leadership and management of organizations in the private sector and those in the public sector (including military organizations with large populations of civilians), much can be gleaned by comparing some of the lessons surfaced within both sectors. Directly applicable to the formulation of a viable change strategy are those management insights relating to the initial assumption of the leadership position.

As Horace stated, “Well begun is half done.” In organizations in the public and private sectors, it is imperative that the strategic leader gets off to a good start with the employees. Retired US Air Force Major General Perry M. Smith, a former Commandant of the Naval War College, addresses various imperatives a new leader should consider upon assuming the leadership of an organization in *Taking Charge*:

- Learn the strengths and weaknesses of key personnel
- Scrutinize the continuity within the organization
- Objectively look at your predecessor (if possible)
- After three months at the helm, in a philosophy letter to the work force, address the rich and successful history of the organization, the commitment of the organization to specific goals, the requirement for personal and institutional integrity, your strategic vision, the policy of decentralization and empowerment of subordinate leaders, the need for innovation, and the process by which creative ideas move up in the organization<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, in *The Dynamics of Taking Charge*, John J. Gabarro, a professor in organizational behavior and human resource management at Harvard Business School, outlines the activities and the problems faced by new leaders after they begin new jobs and actually take charge. Gabarro conducted three sets of field studies over three years involving 17 management successions in organizations in the United States and Europe. Although results showed myriad ways of taking charge, the research revealed distinct stages of improvement through which all new leaders transitioned and several “taking charge” patterns. Most notable was that for organizations within the US, it took from two-and-a-half to three years for managers to progress through these stages and even longer for some European and U.K. senior-level managers.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Gabarro concludes that it takes between three to seven months just to complete what he calls the Taking-Hold stage. This is a period in which the new leader gains “orientational and evaluative learning and begins to take corrective action.”<sup>23</sup>

Likewise, President Franklin D. Roosevelt realized the importance of a quick start after his inauguration and established an aggressive set of New Deal programs within his first 100 days

– all subsequent American presidents’ legislative agendas have been measured against this standard. Also, Donald E.L. Johnson in *The Art of Taking Charge in a New Job* argues that leader actions in the first 100 days are critical for success.<sup>24</sup>

Correspondingly, Michael Watkins, in *Taking Charge*, discusses how transitions during the first few months in a new leadership role are pivotal because everyone expects change; however, he also points out that they are also periods of great vulnerability for new leaders who lack established working relationships or detailed knowledge of their roles. Those who fail to build momentum during their transition face an uphill battle. He lists seven common traps, six of which are relevant to those challenges faced by military leaders of civilian organizations:

- Being Isolated – new leaders must get out and about in their organizations quickly
- Coming in with “The Answer” – employees who believe their leaders’ minds are made up are reticent to share information
- Attempting Too Much – identify the vital few priorities and discipline yourself, and the organization, to focus on those priorities
- Being Captured by the Wrong People – new leaders must exercise great care in deciding who to listen to and to what degree
- Setting Unrealistic Expectations – as performance expectations are typically negotiated early, before new leaders have a thorough understanding of the organization and situation, never presume that an initial mandate will or should remain unchanged
- Failing to Build Coalitions – building coalitions is especially critical for federal leaders who have to manage in a political environment. Devote time to the horizontal dimension of peers and key external constituencies instead of the traditional vertical dimension of influence – upward to bosses and downward to subordinates<sup>25</sup>

Clearly many of the constraints associated with military leadership are not reflected in assuming control of organizations in the civilian sector, especially the length and duration of the initial “taking charge” period. However, many of the principles apply to those military or public organizations with high densities of civilian employees. In most studies, a key aspect of the process is gaining insights and measuring the worth of key members of the organizations. Following this assessment the leader can devise a strategy for building informal and formal support networks, devising and soliciting support from key sub-group members, and formulating a change approach that will mitigate cultural impediments and exploit available organizational support bases.

### Assessing the Civilian Employees and Building a Network

As indicated above, the initial period of taking charge by the leader also stimulates a range of responses from the resident civilian managers. It is during this period that leaders can make their initial assessment and begin formulating an optimal management approach based upon the hand they have been dealt. Concurrently, the civilian managers and executives are developing their own unique responses to the leader's assumption of control...and sending signals that allow for interpretation and eventual management. Within certain limitations, these responses can be categorized to facilitate interpretation. The intent is to establish a typology that will aid the leader in identifying both the attitude and potential of certain sub-groups of civilian employees and can also be used to devise change management strategies to exploit or avoid their potential influence. This paper proposes four different sub-organizational groupings: **Seditionists**, **Skeptics**, **Saluters**, and **Supras**, identifies the motivations of these groups, relates them to theories aforementioned in the Leading People and Leading Change sections, and offers methods for dealing with them in accomplishing organizational objectives.

#### The Seditionists

Merriam-Webster's *Dictionary of Law* defines *sedition* as "creating a revolt, disturbance, or violence against lawful civil authority with the intent to cause its overthrow or destruction." While the Seditionists in the organization likely will not actively work to destroy the organization or overthrow its leader physically, they will try to minimize the leader's influence and stymie progress. They are **motivated by their individual power and preserving the bureaucracy and status quo**. They will publicly state that the leader is the "current" commander, and they will resist any major deviation from *status quo* and question the credibility and legitimacy of any leader action. They are vehemently opposed to change because, if the leader is successful in effecting change, it is only a matter of 24 months (or less) and the next "current" commander will change things, possibly back to the way they were before. Generally, they consider any proposed change as "not worth the effort." Regardless of the innovation of the change proposal, their response is usually characterized by a "we've tried that before and it didn't work" retort. Seditionists include other groupings referred to by Kriegel and Brandt (1996) as Heel Draggers, Saboteurs, Ostriches, and Antagonists.<sup>26</sup> While many in this group may be highly proficient at their jobs, they are usually in the "out-group" referred to by Northouse in his LMX theory – and they are likely to remain there. They habitually decide to remain in the Stranger Phase of the leader-member relationship, choosing to distance themselves from the hierarchy due to their

belief that they themselves actually hold the power in the organization. They see new leadership as a threat to their peer-referent power.

#### Dealing with Seditonists – Neutralization

Dealing with Seditonists is a difficult and time-consuming activity, especially if the leader decides to try to engage them head-on. Pursuing Seditonists for consensus usually fuels their power base and can drive them farther from consensus. Due to the finite nature of the leader's tenure, **the most effective way to deal with this group is to neutralize them** - refrain from efforts to enlist them directly, but instead withdraw their power base by taking away their ability to say "no." Seditonists revel in the fact that they have the power to say "no" - the bureaucracy they seek is replete with *nay-sayers* who impede progress to preserve power and indirectly avoid additional work. Strategic leaders should consider countering the Seditonists by **lowering the level in the organization where employees can say yes** and actually raise the level at which *no* is dictated. This is a difficult challenge, for finding the right level is more art than science and will therefore differ in every level of every organization. While the leader may never enlist this group or receive their consensus, diminishing their power base will allow the leader to focus the organization's finite energy on those members who can truly be enlisted.

#### The Skeptics

While Skeptics may at times assume similar postures as the Seditonists, they tend to be less adamant about opposing change than they are doubtful that change will benefit the organization. They will not actively seek failure of proposed changes, but instead will withhold their support until they have assessed the leader's trustworthiness and sincerity. They are **motivated by trust**. Initially they do not intrinsically accept that a leader is worthy of their support. They want to improve how they are treated, either personally or organizationally and will reserve support until they deem a leader worthy of their extra efforts required to effect change. They are more likely to sit back and carefully observe how leaders treat them and *their* organization, since leaders are transient and "unknown." Alienated Followers<sup>27</sup> (Kelley; 1992), Dissenters, and Fence Riders<sup>28</sup> (Kriegel and Brandt; 1996) are included in this group. Skeptics place themselves in the "out-group" until they perceive a solid commitment from the leader that he will perform *for the organization*. Many Skeptics, who may end up being effective followers, see leaders merely as co-adventurers on a worthy crusade, and if they suspect their leader of flagging commitment or conflicting motives they may just withdraw their support, either by changing jobs or by contriving to change leaders.<sup>29</sup>

## Dealing with Skeptics – Sincerity

It is critical to win these forces over to the “in-group” for inclusion in the guiding coalition. They will become cynical if they think their leader is dealing with deep problems superficially.<sup>30</sup> The greater the difference between what is espoused and what leaders do, the greater the degree of distrust and loss of confidence between the leadership and the followers. **Enlistment of Skeptics requires substantiated sincerity.** Once they see a leader’s commitment to true improvement for both the individual *and* the organization, not just change for change’s sake or for another entry on his Officer Evaluation Report, they quickly transition from the Stranger to the Partner Phase in the leader-member relationship and can be strong forces in helping the leader form his guiding coalition. The fact that they believe in improvement, but are waiting to assess the leader’s trustworthiness and sincerity, makes them much easier recruits than the Seditionists but more difficult than the Saluters. These Skeptics are looking for the “Level 5” leader referred to by Jim Collins, in *Good to Great* – “someone who channels his ego needs away from himself and toward the larger goal of building a great company. It is not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest - they are incredibly ambitious - but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves.”<sup>31</sup>

Subsets of the Skeptics that strategic leaders must avoid at all cost, or manage carefully when putting together a coalition for change, are what Kotter (1990) refers to as the Big Egos (those with egos that fill up a room, leaving no space for anybody else) and the Snakes (people who create enough mistrust to kill teamwork):<sup>32</sup>

Big Egos and Snakes can be extremely intelligent, motivated and productive in certain ways. As such, they can get promoted to senior management positions and be logical candidates for a guiding coalition. Smart change agents seem to be skilled at spotting these people and keeping them off the team. If that’s impossible, capable leaders watch and manage these folks very carefully. Organizations are often reluctant to confront the issue, usually because these people have either special skills or political support. But the alternative is usually worse – having them undermine a new strategy or a cultural renewal effort.<sup>33</sup>

The most dangerous Skeptic is Kotter’s (1990) “Reluctant Player” – “the individual in the organization whose involvement is essential, but for whom there is no high urgency for change, and who is reluctant to sign on to the change, citing lack of both time and qualification to help.”<sup>34</sup> It can be tempting to write off the reluctant player and try to work around them. But if such individuals are central players with authority or credibility, this tactic rarely works well. Very often the problem with signing up the reluctant player goes back to urgency. He does not see the problems and opportunities very clearly and the same holds for the people with whom he

interacts and influences on a daily basis. With complacency high, you will never convince him to give the time and effort needed to create a winning coalition.<sup>35</sup>

### The Saluters

Saluters are quick and vociferous in their support of proposed changes. They are **motivated by stability** - “get it over with and get back to business.” They know that change, especially in a military-led organization, is inevitable, and they want to try to minimize their pain. These forces are usually considered part of the “in-group” - leaders breathe a sigh of relief and believe they are “on board” due to quick compliance with proposed changes. Kelley’s (1992) Sheep, Yes People, and Survivors<sup>36</sup> are all part of this group.

### Dealing with Saluters – Trust, but Verify

Saluters, by their very nature, move quickly to the “in-group.” However, leaders must not give into temptation and forego required maintenance on this group. Often they will unknowingly impede change simply by not taking time for introspection or formulation of the optimal way to implement change. They tend to refrain from giving advice because “the boss says do it this way,” even though they might foresee a better way of operating or implementing the change. Leaders must temper Saluters’ energy and desire to “move out quickly” and keep in balance the requirement for increased guidance and oversight while maintaining the Saluters’ forward momentum. President Reagan perfectly summed up this concept - **trust, but verify** - when discussing possible warming American relations with the Soviet Union in the 1980s. However, if the Saluters perceive that their leader does not trust them – manifested by too much guidance and oversight – they sometimes lose momentum and join the “out-group” ranks of the Skeptics.

### The Supras

The last of the groups is the Supras. Like Saluters, they can also be quick to support proposed change. They need oversight, but the major difference is the Supras’ **motive** – **security of their egos** – making them possibly the most difficult and dangerous group with whom the leader will interact. They are the former power brokers (the cronies) in the organization who perceive that they have lost the influence they previously enjoyed solely due to the change of command. They were either brought in by the former regime or had been successful in being part of the “in-group.” With the recent transition of leadership, their very foundation is on shaky ground for they do not know whether their relationship with the new leader will bear similar fruit as with the previous regime. Supras desperately want to regain recognition and harmony, and will do seemingly anything to secure a place in the new “in-



group.” They will be quick to publicly support anything the leader recommends, and will work hard to garner his trust and confidence. They exemplify traits inherent in the Partner Phase of the leader-member relationship and they are looking for opportunities to show their trust and confidence in the leader and their willingness to be on the “team.”

#### Dealing with Supras – Question Individual Motives

Dealing with a Supra requires a delicate and nuanced approach. The strategic leader must **identify the Supra’s motive** (each ego is different). The challenge is to question Supra feedback to ensure it is sound and not just something that will garner favor without, in the interim, alienating these potentially effective allies in change management. While Supras outwardly espouse that “the change is good,” inwardly they are reeling from the recent leadership transition and seek positional security. They will seemingly do anything to attain it, even if their actions end up, either purposely or serendipitously, being detrimental to the organization. If the Supra’s motive is self-aggrandizement, a good rule of thumb is to give him some counseling and then send him off to a job that takes him away from the headquarters,<sup>37</sup> if possible and as appropriate. Personnel changes may be difficult in government, but they are not impossible, and the effort is usually worth it.<sup>38</sup> If a Supra is truly an asset to the mission, and his reinstatement will benefit the organization’s posture for change, the leader should give him a sense of security by telling him that he is a respected member of the group of whom much is expected. He can be effective in providing continuity while the new leader tackles the task of building the strategic team for the organization.

#### Building the Strategic Team

Teambuilding is indispensable in all organizations, but uniquely challenging at the strategic level. Powerful sub-cultures and both social and political networks render ineffective the traditional leadership and teambuilding strategies used at lower operational levels. In order to build the strategic team, the leader must first establish and effectively communicate a clear vision for the organization - without this essential first step, all subsequent efforts at teambuilding are problematic. He must then negotiate the obstacles inherent in the organization’s sub-cultures in order to assess organizational strengths and challenges, the result of which is the identification and consolidation of existing backers. Next, in the effort to win over as many supporters as possible, the leader must continually seek to develop high-quality “in-group” type relationships with as many groups and subordinates as possible, both vertically (up to bosses and down through the ranks) and horizontally (peers and key external organizations). This effort results in the identification of social and political support partnerships

and networks (formal and informal) throughout the organization that the leader, much like an alchemist transmutes base metal to gold, must then transform into a strategic team to achieve his vision.

The strategic leader's teambuilding challenges are compounded by the fact that he must influence individuals and sub-groups within and external to the organization over which he has relatively little direct control or only tangential authority. Overcoming organizational inertia and dealing with inherent cultural complexities requires adroit management and interpersonal skills. Successful leaders build effective core teams from the most influential and essential organizational members. This requires a team building "strategy" that solicits and recruits the most critical members using the most appropriate messages. Concurrently, the team building efforts must also establish an informal network of team members within and external to the organization whose active support may not be immediately required but whose "buy in" may ensure the long term viability of the change effort. The resultant strategic team is a combination of a "close-knit alliance of the solicited needed" and a "loose coalition of the enticed willing."<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

Strategic leaders are faced with new and different leadership and management challenges. Many find themselves unprepared for the conditions, politics and intrigue exigent within organizations with high densities of civilians. Success within these civilian organizations requires both cross-cultural savvy and the formulation and application of unique approaches to various "types" of individuals. The understanding of civilian cultures and sub-cultures and how they influence organizational performance is essential in limiting friction, overcoming institutional impediments, attaining strategic objectives and managing change. Leading civilian organizations requires the mastery of several important competencies: effective communication, negotiation skills, consensus building techniques, and recognizing the importance that certain types of *individuals* and *groupings of individuals* have on the success or failure of strategic change efforts. As the current and future strategic environment calls for increased collaboration and consensus building between and within military and civilian organizations, the Department of Defense must adapt their leader development, training and educational programs to prepare strategic leaders to more effectively lead increasingly diverse and civilian-populated organizations. The above group typology and corresponding recommended leader approaches may provide a useful template to guide leader action and improve the likelihood of success.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Army War College Department of Command, Leadership and Management, *Strategic Leadership Course Core Curriculum Directive* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S Army War College, Academic Year 2007), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher M. Schnaubelt, "Interagency Command and Control: Planning for Counterdrug Support," *Military Review* 76 (September-October 1996): 18.

<sup>3</sup> Colonel Stephen A. Shambach, ed., *U.S. Army War College Department of Command, Leadership and Management Strategic Leadership Primer*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2004), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Martin L. Cook, "Army Professionalism: Service to What Ends?" in *The Future of the Army Profession*, ed. Don M. Snider and Gayle L. Watkins (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 2002), 347.

<sup>5</sup> Gregg F. Martin and Jeffrey D. McCausland, "The Role of Strategic Leaders for the Future Army Profession," in *The Future of the Army Profession* (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 2002), 431.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations*, Department of Defense Directive 3000.05 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 28 November 2005), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew H. Van de Ven and M. Scott Poole, "Explaining Development and Change in Organizations," *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (1995): 510.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 512-513.

<sup>9</sup> Sergio Fernandez and Hal G. Rainey, "Managing Successful Organizational Change in the Public Sector," *Public Administration* 66 (March/April 2006): 168.

<sup>10</sup> Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2003). 152.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>12</sup> John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>13</sup> Edgar H. Schein, *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, Inc., 1999), 29.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Leadership Be, Know, Do*, Field Manual 22-100 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 31 August 1999), 3-14.

<sup>15</sup> George Flynn, "Understanding the Gap," *Marine Corps Gazette* 82 (September 1998): 20.

<sup>16</sup> The archaic civil service personnel system is described in a number of commission and study group reports and is the reason for the initiation of the National Security Personnel System (NSPS) reform effort. Unfortunately, many of the NSPS measures intended to address

the employee responsiveness and performance have been challenged in court and may very likely not be implemented. For a description of the problems of the civil service personnel system, see: Clark A. Murdock, "Strengthening Civilian Professionals in Defense and National Security," in *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: Defense Reform for a new Strategic Era*, Phase 1 Report, (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 2004), 51-59.

<sup>17</sup> The military has little tolerance for insubordination or lapses in discipline. Army Regulation 600-2, *The Armed Forces Officer*, 1 February 1988, addresses the essentiality of strict obedience in the military: "[The] purpose [of discipline] is to make Soldiers so well trained that they will carry out orders quickly and *intelligently* even under the most difficult conditions." (italics in original; paragraph 3-35). Additionally, in paragraph 3-15, the Army identifies the ultimate reason for reliance on unwavering compliance and discipline is that "proper and prompt execution of orders will save lives in combat." Likewise, The Manual for Courts-Martial (MCM), United States (2005 Edition) covers myriad punitive offenses for insubordination. For example, Article 90 addresses willful disobedience of a superior commissioned officer. Soldiers who "willfully disobey a lawful command of his superior commissioned officer shall be punished; if the offense is committed in time of war, by death or such other punishment as a court-martial may direct, and if the offense is committed at any other time, by such punishment [maximum is dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of all pay and allowances, and confinement for 5 years] other than death, as a court-martial may direct." Similarly, Article 92 addresses dereliction in the performance of duties (either by willful dereliction of duties or through neglect or culpable inefficiency), a court-martial offense that may result in forfeiture of two-thirds pay per month for 3 months and confinement for 3 months (for neglect or culpable inefficiency) or, for willful disobedience, may result in a bad-conduct discharge, forfeiture of all pay and allowances, and confinement for 6 months.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Fisher and William Ury, *Getting to Yes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 36-37.

<sup>19</sup> Fernandez and Rainey, 168.

<sup>20</sup> Kotter, 62.

<sup>21</sup> Perry M. Smith, *Taking Charge* (New York: Avery Publishing Group, Inc., 1988), 19.

<sup>22</sup> John J. Gabarro, *Dynamics of Taking Charge* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1987), 3-13.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>24</sup> Donald E.L. Johnson, "The Art of Taking Charge in a New Job," *Health Care Strategic Management* 23 (April 2005): 2.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Watkins, "Taking Charge," *Government Executive* 36 (April 2004): 76-77.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Kriegel and David Brandt, *Sacred Cows Make the Best Burgers: Paradigm-Busting Strategies for Developing Change-Ready People and Organizations* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), 193-195. Heel Draggers are the people who oppose change quietly through non-cooperation. They will nod their heads yes but they will act *no*. Saboteurs are also silent resistors, but their actions are more aggressive. They not only drag their heels, they create real

obstacles to plans like holding back information, planting bugs in the new software, or conveniently losing important data – “So sorry.” Saboteurs are dangerous because they can wreak havoc and leaders will never see them; these may be the most troublesome. Ostriches pretend nothing is happening. They are uninformed, have not paid or do not want to pay attention. With their heads in the sand, they act like change will go away if they just ignore it. Antagonists are vocal, loud, and annoying. These “clubhouse lawyers” seize the microphone and will not surrender it. Arguments cannot sway them. They are unwilling to compromise or negotiate. They opposed change no matter how small simply because it is *change*.

<sup>27</sup> Robert E. Kelly, “In Praise of Followers,” in *Managing People and Organizations*, ed. John J. Gabarro (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1992), 145. Alienated Followers are critical and independent in their thinking but passive in carrying out their role. Somehow, sometime, something turned them off. Often cynical, they tend to sink gradually into disgruntled acquiescence, seldom openly opposing leaders’ efforts.

<sup>28</sup> Kriegel and Brandt, 194. Fence Riders are cautious. They take a long time making up their minds, do not want to make a mistake or go against co-workers and track the prevailing winds before taking a position.

<sup>29</sup> Kelly, 145.

<sup>30</sup> Watkins, 76.

<sup>31</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2001), 21.

<sup>32</sup> Kotter, 59.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 59-61.

<sup>36</sup> Kelly, 145. Sheep are passive and uncritical, lacking in initiative and sense of responsibility. They perform the tasks given them and stop. Yes People are a livelier but equally unenterprising group. Dependent on a leader for inspiration, they can be aggressively deferential, even servile. Bosses weak in judgment and self-confidence tend to like them and to form alliances with them that can stultify the organization. Survivors perpetually sample the wind and live by the slogan “better safe than sorry.” They are adept at surviving change.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Watkins, 76.

<sup>39</sup> Edward J. Filiberti, “Strategic Team Building,” Draft Paper for the *U.S. Army War College Department of Command, Leadership and Management Strategic Leadership Primer*, Carlisle Barracks, PA, March 10, 2007, 15-17.

